

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON

12 January 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

SUBJECT: Intelligence Estimates of Soviet Conventional Force Size (C)

I believe that we have been and still are seriously overstating the size and capabilities of the ground and supporting tactical air forces of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. Overstating enemy capabilities can, of course, be just as dangerous as understating them. Rather than leading to our acquiring an extra margin of safety, the overstatement of Soviet conventional forces can lead to defeatism and counsels of despair. Perhaps the most important obstacle in the way of achieving conventional forces adequate to defend NATO is the widespread belief that Soviet forces are much larger and more powerful than they actually are, and therefore, that reasonably attainable forces would accomplish little for the defense of NATO. If there is a substantial range of uncertainty associated with our estimates of Soviet conventional forces, as I am sure there is, then it should be reflected in the estimates and not be replaced by a high estimate that is put forward as a certainty.

I believe that we are now making substantial progress in bringing realism into the comparison of U.S. and Allied tactical air capabilities and those of the Sino Soviet Bloc, and I hope to see this progress continue.

It is clear to me that similar progress is required in our estimates of Warsaw Pact ground forces. For example, the 1962 Chairman's General Purpose Forces Study Group assumed "The Soviet Bloc could have 62 divisions deployed by M+15 in the central front area. The maximum divisional force that can be maintained in Eastern Europe without surface interdiction is 132. This position can be attained by M+90." Yet CIA studies indicate that in 1962, the Soviets spent the equivalent of about \$1.4 billion on procurement of land armament. To be sure, they spent more in earlier years. But even in 1958, the total was roughly equivalent to \$2.6 billion. We know that at least \$3.3 billion annually is required to equip 22 U.S. divisions. If this is the case, how can the Soviets have reasonably modern equipment for even 22 divisions? How could they possibly be producing enough equipment for the alleged 62 or 132 divisions? I have been told that the Soviets could accomplish this because they never throw equipment away, and therefore they have large stores of old equipment. But this explanation is in conflict with what the U.S. Army tells me about its own modernization requirements and about personnel required to maintain equipment in a combat ready state. Moreover, I am told that NATO has

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not only more men under arms, but more men in Army ground forces than has the Warsaw Pact. If so, how is it that the Soviets achieve such a high degree of military effectiveness? Finally, there is a great apparent disparity in estimates of the relationship between reserve (or cadre unit) manning and training levels and readiness for U.S. and Soviet forces. If our estimates of the readiness of our priority reserve divisions are correct, then we must be overstating the readiness of many Soviet units.

In view of these considerations, would you please ask the Director of DIA to undertake a revision of last year's study of Warsaw Pact conventional forces, giving very careful scrutiny to the evidence underlying the force estimates.

Moreover, I would like to know whether the use of cost and budgetary estimates for the Soviets can yield improved insight into the quality of Soviet military units? As we know from our own experience, costs of a standard military unit can vary widely with corresponding variations in effectiveness. Current intelligence does not differentiate sharply enough this qualitative aspect of the force structure.

Also, I would like to know whether the Soviet military establishment has certain expenditure patterns which, as compared to our own, provide more military capability for the same cost. For example, the Soviets appear to keep more active units at less than full strength than we do. It is argued, however, that these units can be so quickly filled up with reserves that the Soviet combat effectiveness is little degraded by this practice. Is this so? Why would not the same reasoning apply to U.S. forces?

Next, I would like to know whether the problem of estimation of the size and capabilities of Soviet conventional forces is receiving a sufficiently high priority in our intelligence collection programs.

Finally, I would like the results of this review to be supplied to the Special Studies Group for use in its review of NATO force requirements. I would like to have a report on this study no later than May 15. I have asked Mr. Hitch to serve as a point of contact with the Joint Staff during the development of this study.

/S/ Robert S. McNamara

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